

ANDREAS J. KÖSTENBERGER



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GOD'S  
DESIGN  
*for*  
MAN  
*and*  
WOMAN

✿

A BIBLICAL-THEOLOGICAL SURVEY



MARGARET E. KÖSTENBERGER

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*for*  
M A N  
*and*  
W O M A N

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ANDREAS J. KÖSTENBERGER AND  
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 CROSSWAY

WHEATON, ILLINOIS

*God's Design for Man and Woman: A Biblical-Theological Survey*

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Published by Crossway

1300 Crescent Street  
Wheaton, Illinois 60187

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Cover design: Erik Maldre

Cover image: Bridgeman Images

First printing 2014

Printed in the United States of America

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Trade paperback ISBN: 978-1-4335-3699-1

ePub ISBN: 978-1-4335-3702-8

PDF ISBN: 978-1-4335-3700-4

Mobipocket ISBN: 978-1-4335-3701-1

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### Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Köstenberger, Andreas J., 1957-

God's design for man and woman : a biblical-theological survey / Andreas J. Köstenberger and Margaret E. Köstenberger.

pages cm.

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 978-1-4335-3699-1 (tp)

1. Theological anthropology—Biblical teaching.  
2. Theological anthropology—Christianity. 3. Men—Biblical teaching. 4. Man (Christian theology) 5. Women—Biblical teaching. 6. Women—Religious aspects—Christianity.  
7. Bible—Criticism, interpretation, etc. I. Title.

BS670.5.K67 2014

233—dc23

2013044702

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Crossway is a publishing ministry of Good News Publishers.

VP 24 23 22 21 20 19 18 17 16 15 14  
15 14 13 12 11 10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

To our children:  
Lauren, Tahlia, David, and Timothy  
We love you!



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# What Did Jesus Do?

## Gospels

He went on through cities and villages, proclaiming and bringing the good news of the kingdom of God. And the twelve were with him, and also some women.

—Luke 8:1–2a

### Key Points

1. Jesus appointed twelve men to form the core leadership group for his new messianic community, the church.
2. Jesus treated women consistently with respect, dignity, and compassion and allowed them to learn from him as his disciples.
3. Jesus encouraged the participation of a few devoted women followers in his mission. These women showed their loyalty to him up to the cross and beyond.
4. Jesus affirmed the continuity of God's original design for men and women in Genesis 1–3.

In 1896 Charles Sheldon, a Congregationalist pastor in Topeka, Kansas, published a book based on a series of sermons he had preached. The title: *In His Steps: What Would Jesus Do?* In the novel, Reverend Henry Maxwell meets a homeless man who, after attending a service at his church, challenges him to live up to his Christian commitment. After the man has heard the congregation sing the song “All for Jesus” at a church prayer meeting, he wonders: Why don’t more people live that way? “I suppose I don’t understand,” he says. “But what would Jesus

do? Is that what you mean by following His steps?”<sup>1</sup> As the novel continues, many of the characters begin to ask themselves the question, “What would Jesus do?” as they face important decisions. As a result, they become more serious Christians and focus on the core of Christianity—the life of Jesus.

More recently, in the 1990s it became popular among Christian youth groups to wear WWJD bracelets. In 2010 a movie, *WWJD*, was released that is based on Sheldon’s book. The expression, “What would Jesus do?” has led to numerous offshoots and parodies in recent years, some of them humorous. Conservatives today might ask, “What would Reagan do?” Peace advocates might put a bumper sticker on their car, sardonically asking, “Who would Jesus bomb?” Management gurus have embraced the principle as well, exhorting corporate executives to lead by example as Jesus did and to cultivate habits such as exercising “management by walking around.”

Truth told, Sheldon’s principle of asking the question, What would Jesus do? needs some serious qualification, if for no other reason than that there are many things Jesus did that we can never do (e.g., die on the cross for the sins of the world, perform startling miracles such as healing the sick and raising the dead). In fact, Sheldon’s approach to the Christian life was one of the tributaries that led to the Social Gospel, a movement endowed with a heavy dose of theological liberalism and Christian socialism.

Nevertheless, once we’ve understood the centrality of the cross in salvation and our need to first and foremost repent of our sin and place our faith in Jesus as our Savior and Lord, it is hard to deny that the life of Jesus—both his teachings and his practice—should occupy a central place in our thinking and actions. As part of our biblical-theological survey on the identities and roles of men and women according to God’s design, it is therefore critical to ask the question, What did Jesus do? And what did he teach on the subject? In fact, some feminists have claimed that Jesus himself was a feminist;<sup>2</sup> others have argued that he established an egalitarian community where leadership

<sup>1</sup>Charles M. Sheldon, *In His Steps: What Would Jesus Do?* (Alachua, FL: Bridge-Logos, 1999), 18, first published by *The Advance* (Chicago, 1867–1917) in serial form.

<sup>2</sup>Leonard Swidler, “Jesus Was a Feminist,” *Catholic World* 212 (January 1971): 177–83. More recently, see Sarah Bessey, *Jesus Feminist: An Invitation to Revisit the Bible’s View of Women* (New York: Howard, 2013).

was shared equally between women and men.<sup>3</sup> On the other side of the spectrum, some have countered that while Jesus was uniquely affirming of women as people and encouraged them to follow him and to learn from him, he did not radically break with the male pattern of leadership which, as we've seen, has a long pedigree in biblical history. How are we to resolve this vital question?

The New Testament picks up the biblical narrative with the four Gospels, which recount the life, ministry, death, and resurrection of Jesus. While the Gospels display a great deal of similarity, each Gospel is a literary work in its own right, and some of the Gospel writers focus on the roles of men and women more than others. Several important questions will guide our study. What do Jesus's teaching about men and women and his dealings with them contribute to the overall teaching of Scripture on the subject? Did Jesus affirm the original creation order or replace it with his own teaching? How does Jesus compare to other first-century Jewish teachers in his attitude toward women? How do Jesus's teaching and conduct relate to later New Testament teaching? Our expectation is that because the message of Scripture is unified, the practice of Jesus and the early Christians, including Paul, will ultimately be found in harmony.

In studies on the subject, the Gospels and Jesus have often been overshadowed by the statements and teachings of Paul.<sup>4</sup> There are relatively few evangelical treatments of the roles of men and women in Jesus and the Gospels.<sup>5</sup> It's always precarious when we mine data with a particular question in mind when the text being examined wasn't primarily written to answer that question. The Gospels weren't written primarily to deal with gender roles but to set forth the truth about Jesus and salvation in him. Still, we can legitimately observe some of the data that are relevant to our topic. On the whole, we'll see that the

<sup>3</sup> Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *In Memory of Her: A Feminist Theological Reconstruction of Christian Origins* (New York: Crossroad, 1983).

<sup>4</sup> See Jonathan Pennington, *Reading the Gospels Wisely: A Narrative and Theological Introduction* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2012), who argues that the Gospels should hold a "privileged place" in interpretation (p. 230) and serve as "the guiding principle (even *regula fidei*) and lodestar for understanding and standing under all Holy Scripture" (p. 231).

<sup>5</sup> An exception is James Borland, "Women in the Life and Teaching of Jesus," in *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood: A Response to Biblical Feminism*, ed. John Piper and Wayne Grudem (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 1991), 105–16. A comparable evangelical feminist work is Grant Osborne, "Women in Jesus' Ministry," *Westminster Theological Journal* 51 (1989): 259–91. Osborne's treatment of passages in which Jesus interacts with women is quite careful, but in his conclusion he at times goes beyond the evidence.

discussion in the Gospels on the subject of men's and women's roles is more indirect than in Genesis 1–3 and the New Testament letters, particularly Paul's writings. So let's continue our journey through the biblical landscape by taking a closer look at Jesus and the Gospels.

### **The Maleness and Humanity of Jesus Himself**

Before we look at Jesus's interactions with both men and women in the Gospels, it will be important to discuss the nature of Jesus himself in terms of his humanity and his gender.<sup>6</sup> Scripture clearly teaches that the humanity of Jesus was essential for his mission to die on the cross for our sins. Paul writes in Romans, "For what the law was powerless to do because it was weakened by the flesh, God did by sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh to be a sin offering" (Rom. 8:3 NIV). The author of the book of Hebrews writes, "Since the children have flesh and blood, he [Jesus] too shared in their humanity so that by his death he might break the power of him who holds the power of death—that is, the devil—and free those who all their lives were held in slavery by their fear of death" (Heb. 2:14–15 NIV). The author continues, "For this reason he had to be made like them, fully human in every way, in order that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in service to God, and that he might make atonement for the sins of the people" (v. 17 NIV). Thus it is beyond dispute that Jesus must be *human* to die for our sins and bring us to God.

That said, it is also a historical fact that Jesus was incarnated not as a transgendered person or in some other generic way, but as a male. Jesus's maleness is of interest to us yet sometimes is offensive to those who see it as part of the male-centered nature of Christianity—where God is called "Father" and Jesus is the Son.<sup>7</sup> That their salvation depends on a male Savior's vicarious death is difficult to swallow for some. Some recent Bible translations have even gone out of their way to emphasize the humanity of Jesus and to downplay the maleness of

<sup>6</sup>See Micah Daniel Carter, "Reconsidering the Maleness of Jesus," *Journal of Biblical Manhood and Womanhood* 13 (Spring 2008): 27–41. See also the twelve reasons for Jesus's maleness, given by Bruce A. Ware, "Could Our Savior Have Been a Woman?," *Journal of Biblical Manhood and Womanhood* 2008 (Spring 2003): 33 (cited on p. 39 of Carter's essay).

<sup>7</sup>See appendix 1. Rosemary Radford Ruether famously asked, "Can a male savior save women?" (see the title of chap. 5 in *Sexism and God-Talk: Toward a Feminist Theology* [Boston: Beacon, 1993], 116). For an insightful study see Linda D. Peacore, *The Role of Women's Experience in Feminist Theologies of Atonement*, Princeton Theological Monograph Series (Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2010).

Jesus, stressing that it's the former, not the latter, that is essential for salvation.

Nevertheless, the question arises whether the maleness of Jesus is really as completely irrelevant and inconsequential as is often asserted. In light of the male pattern of leadership demonstrated in the Old Testament—where patriarchs, kings, and priests were typically male—it stands to reason that it was hardly co-

incidental that Jesus, as the representative head of humanity and as the Davidic king, was born and walked the earth as a male. In his maleness, Jesus continues the pattern of male leadership that ranges all the way from Adam to the patriarchs, and from kings and priests to the Messiah and, as we will see, beyond

*“In his maleness, Jesus continues the pattern of male leadership that ranges all the way from Adam to the patriarchs, and from kings and priests to the Messiah and, as we will see, beyond to the Twelve, the Pauline circle, and elders in the New Testament church.”*

to the Twelve, the Pauline circle, and elders in the New Testament church. In light of the pervasive male pattern of leadership in both Testaments, it is virtually inconceivable that Jesus might have been incarnated as a woman. And while it was Jesus's humanity, not his maleness, that was essential for our salvation, Jesus's maleness was nonetheless significant in that it underscored God's male pattern of leadership. With this, we turn our attention to men in the Gospels.

### **Men in the Gospels**

The primary group of men mentioned in all four Gospels is Jesus's twelve apostles. Beyond this, the Gospels feature numerous other men in interaction with Jesus, as characters in Jesus's parables, and at other occasions. We'll start our discussion of men in the Gospels with a survey of the significance of the Twelve and brief character sketches of each of these men. While these character sketches don't strictly serve to advance our thesis that Scripture exhibits a pattern of male leadership, they will help us to get better acquainted with the specific men who were members of the early church's nascent leadership in training, the Twelve. After this, we'll take a look at some of the other significant men mentioned in the Gospels in various contexts and functions.

**The Twelve**

One of the most important aspects of Jesus's ministry was his selection and training of the Twelve, who were all men. In this, Jesus continued the pattern of male leadership which, as we've seen, originated in the Old Testament structure of the twelve tribes and was also characteristic of the offices of king and priest. The Twelve were the core group of Jesus's new messianic community, the new Israel, who would take the gospel starting in Jerusalem to the ends of the earth, in keeping with the Great Commission of the risen Christ (Acts 1:8; cf. Matt. 28:16–20). Jesus also appointed and sent out the seventy (or seventy-two; Luke 10:1). In addition, he often preached to larger audiences and was very popular with the crowds.

In contrast to the Jewish religious leaders, who misled the people in their hypocrisy and thirst for power (Matthew 23), Jesus was the model and master teacher (*rabbi*, literally “my great one”), and his followers, particularly the Twelve, were his students (*mathētai*, from *manthanō*, “to learn”). Clearly, Jesus's main purpose for the Twelve was to prepare them for roles of leadership in his messianic community after his death, resurrection, and ascension. He sought to instill in them the importance of focusing on advancing the kingdom of God; on representing him and spreading the news about him rather than being focused on themselves (“taking up his cross,” Matt. 10:38; 16:24; Mark 8:34; Luke 9:23); using their positions of leadership to serve others (Matt. 18:1–5; 20:25–28; Mark 9:33–37; 10:32–45; Luke 9:46–48; John 13:1–20); and caring for those under their charge in sacrificial self-giving (John 10:28).<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>8</sup>We are indebted for these points to the unpublished paper by Daniel I. Block, “Leadership, Leaders in the New Testament” (provided courtesy of the author). Table 3.1 essentially reproduces that in Andreas J. Köstenberger, L. Scott Kellum, and Charles L. Quarles, *The Cradle, the Cross, and the Crown: An Introduction to the New Testament* (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2009), 200–201.

Table 3.1: The Twelve

Name	Key Scriptures	Description
Simon Peter	Matt. 4:18; 16:13–17, 21–23; Luke 22:54–62; John 21:15–19	Fisherman before being called to follow Jesus; one of inner circle
Andrew	Matt. 4:18; John 1:40; 6:8; 12:22	Peter’s brother; fisherman
James	Matt. 4:21; Mark 3:17; 9:2; 14:33; Acts 12:1–5	Former fisherman; John’s brother; in inner circle; martyred by Herod
John	Matt. 4:21; Mark 3:17; 9:2; 14:33; John 13:23; 21:2	Former fisherman; in inner circle; “disciple Jesus loved”
Philip	John 1:43–48; 6:5–7; 12:21–22; Acts 8:4–40	Brought Nathanael to Jesus; ministry in Samaria, to Ethiopian eunuch
Bartholomew (Nathanael)	Matt. 10:3; Mark 3:18; Luke 6:14; John 1:43–49; Acts 1:13	Seen by Jesus under fig tree; calls Jesus “Son of God,” “King of Israel”
Thomas	John 11:16; 14:5; 20:24–29; 21:2	Doubting Thomas; later worshiped Jesus as “my Lord and my God”
Matthew (Levi)	Matt. 9:9–13; 10:3; Mark 2:18; Luke 6:15	Former tax collector; brother of James son of Alphaeus?
James son of Alphaeus	Matt. 10:3; Mark 3:18; Luke 6:15; Acts 1:13	Brother of Matthew?
Thaddaeus (Judas son of James)	Matt. 10:3; Mark 3:18; Luke 6:16; Acts 1:13	Also known as Judas son of James; the “other Judas” (not Iscariot)

Name	Key Scriptures	Description
Simon the Zealot	Matt. 10:4; Mark 3:18; Luke 6:15; Acts 1:13	Former zealot (Jewish freedom fighter)
Judas Iscariot	Matt. 10:4; 26:14–16; 27:3–10; John 6:70–72; 12:4–6; 13:21–30; 17:12; Acts 1:16–20	The traitor; keeper of disciples' moneybag; betrayed Jesus, then hanged himself

*Simon Peter.* Simon Peter was the spokesman and leader of the Twelve. He and his brother Andrew were among the first disciples called by Jesus to follow him (Matt. 4:18). Both of them were Galilean fishermen. Jesus renamed Simon *petros*, “the Rock,” and made the dramatic announcement that he’d build his church on Peter’s confession of Jesus as the Messiah and Son of the living God (Matt. 16:13–17, 21–23). In keeping with Jesus’s prediction, Peter denied knowing Jesus three times prior to the crucifixion. After the resurrection, Jesus re-commissioned Peter to gospel ministry and predicted Peter’s eventual martyrdom (John 21:15–19). Jesus gave Peter the “keys to the kingdom,” which awarded Peter primacy in the early stages of the church’s mission after Pentecost. At Pentecost, Peter preached a powerful sermon, and three thousand people were converted (Acts 2:14–41). Later, in response to a heavenly vision, he was used by God to open up the gospel to Cornelius, a Gentile (Acts 10:1–8). Peter also wrote two letters that are included in the New Testament canon (1, 2 Peter).

*Andrew.* Andrew, Simon Peter’s brother, likewise was a Galilean fisherman (Matt. 4:18). According to John’s Gospel, Andrew brought Peter to Jesus (John 1:40). Together with Philip, he’s also mentioned at two other occasions in Jesus’s ministry, the feeding of the five thousand and the coming of a group of Greeks to Jesus prior to the crucifixion (John 6:8; 12:22). Andrew, too, was martyred according to Christian tradition.

*James.* James and his brother John, the sons of Zebedee, were another pair of brothers called to follow Jesus (Matt. 4:21; Mark 3:17). Like Peter and Andrew, they were Galilean fishermen. Their father, Zebedee, had a fishing business that employed several people. James,

together with his brother John and the apostle Peter, made up Jesus's inner circle, which was privileged to witness certain key events, such as the transfiguration, not witnessed by the other apostles (Mark 9:2). James was martyred by Herod, the grandson of Herod the Great, in AD 42 (Acts 12:1–5). He is not to be confused with Jesus's half-brother also named James (author of the epistle of James in the New Testament).

*John.* John the son of Zebedee, as mentioned, was the brother of James and a Galilean fisherman (Matt. 4:21; Mark 3:17). The author of the Gospel that bears his name, as well as of 1, 2, and 3 John and Revelation, John called himself “the disciple Jesus loved,” an expression of authorial modesty (e.g., John 13:23). Love is a key theme in both the Gospel and John's letters, indicating that John never got over the fact of how much God loved him. John also penned what is arguably the most beloved verse in the entire Bible, John 3:16: “God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.” According to tradition, John, who may have been the youngest member of the Twelve, lived to a ripe old age and died during the reign of the Roman Emperor Trajan (AD 98–117).

*Philip and Bartholomew/Nathanael.* Like Peter and Andrew, Philip was from the town of Bethsaida (John 1:43–44). According to John's Gospel, Philip brought Nathanael (possibly called Bartholomew) to Jesus, who told him that he'd seen him under a fig tree. At this, Nathanael called Jesus “Son of God” and “king of Israel” and followed him (John 1:43–48). Later, Nathanael is mentioned as one of the seven disciples who went fishing together with Peter subsequent to the crucifixion and saw the risen Jesus (John 21:2). Philip, as mentioned, is featured in conjunction with Andrew at the feeding of the five thousand and at the coming of some Greeks who wanted to see Jesus (John 6:5–7; 12:21–22). Philip's request in the upper room that Jesus show him the Father led to a memorable interchange (John 14:8–11).

*Thomas.* Thomas, called “the Twin” by John in his Gospel (John 11:16; 21:2), is commonly known as “Doubting Thomas.” John's Gospel tells the story of how Thomas refused to believe the report by the ten other apostles (minus Judas) according to which Jesus had appeared to them in Thomas's absence. A week later, Jesus appeared to the Eleven,

including Thomas, and challenged Thomas to believe, at which time he worshiped Jesus as his Lord and God (John 20:24–29). On an earlier occasion, Thomas registered a sarcastic comment when Jesus set out to raise Lazarus from the dead and later asked Jesus a question in the upper room that prompted Jesus to affirm that he was “the way, and the truth, and the life” (John 11:16; 14:5).

*Matthew.* Matthew (also called Levi) was a former tax collector who was called by Jesus and followed him (Matt. 9:9–13). He was also the author of the first Gospel, which has had an enormous impact on the Christian church. Like some of the other apostles, Matthew the tax collector epitomizes Jesus’s ministry among the outcast and lower classes of Jewish society. Tax collectors were despised among the Jews, who viewed them as traitors because they collected taxes for the hated Roman overlords who occupied Palestine.

*James son of Alphaeus, Thaddaeus, and Simon the Zealot.* Comparatively little is known about these three members of the Twelve other than their consistent listing among the apostles in the apostolic lists in Matthew, Mark, Luke, and Acts (Matt. 10:3–4; Mark 3:18; Luke 6:15–16; Acts 1:13). James son of Alphaeus isn’t to be confused with James son of Zebedee and brother of John. He is also not James the half-brother of Jesus, one-time head of the Jerusalem church who wrote the letter of James included in the New Testament. Thaddaeus may be the same person as Judas (not Iscariot) who asked Jesus a question in the upper room. Simon the Zealot was formerly a zealot or Jewish freedom fighter. Remarkably, he attached himself to Jesus, who took a very different approach to the Romans than the zealots did.

*Judas Iscariot.* Judas Iscariot was the traitor who betrayed Jesus to the Sanhedrin for thirty pieces of silver (Matt. 27:3). He was also the keeper of the moneybag and a thief who helped himself to some of its contents. He objected to Mary of Bethany’s anointing of Jesus, protesting that the proceeds from the perfume she used could have been given to the poor (John 12:5–6). Jesus knew all along that Judas would betray him but chose Judas in order to fulfill Scripture (John 17:12; cf. 6:70–71; 13:1–3). After betraying Jesus, Judas was overcome by remorse and went and hanged himself (Matt. 27:3–10; see also Acts 1:16–20). He was buried in the potter’s field in keeping with scriptural prediction

(Matt. 27:10). Jesus darkly remarked that it would have been better had Judas not been born (Matt. 26:24).

### **The Twelve: The Kind of Men They Were**

What kind of men were those whom Jesus chose as his twelve apostles? What composite picture emerges from the brief character sketches of each of the members of the Twelve that we've provided? Several observations can be made. First, these men are heads of households, working and providing for their families. Several (including two pairs of brothers) are fishermen, engaging in demanding physical labor in making a living for their families. Another worked as a tax collector. Based on the biblical evidence, we can safely surmise that at least some if not most or even all of these men were heads of households, married with families (see, e.g., the references to Peter's mother-in-law in Matt. 8:14–15 and parallels; see also 1 Cor. 9:5: "Do we not have the right to take along a believing wife, as do the other apostles and the brothers of the Lord and Cephas?"). As such, they provided for their families by working in various professions. (Jesus himself, of course, worked as a carpenter, a trade he learned from his adoptive father Joseph [Mark 6:3; Matt. 13:55].)

Second, these men were doubtless diverse, not only in terms of profession but also with regard to their background, interests, and temperament. Peter's impetuous nature, as well as his raw courage, is well known. John, on the other hand, was more reflective; he may also have been considerably younger (at least he outruns Peter in their race to the empty tomb!). Thomas had a tendency to be critical, if not sarcastic. Andrew, for his part, was quite an encourager. Every time he's mentioned in John's Gospel, he's introducing someone to Jesus, most notably his brother Peter. Philip, too, encouraged Nathanael to consider Jesus's messianic claims. No wonder that Philip and Andrew seemed to like hanging out together! At least there are several occasions in John's Gospel where the two are mentioned together, such as at the feeding of the multitudes or when a group of Greeks approaches them, wanting to see Jesus. Judas Iscariot, of course, was a thief and ended up betraying Jesus into the hands of his enemies. As mentioned, we don't know a whole lot about several of the other men Jesus chose as his apostles, but clearly they were a diverse bunch.

Third (and for our present purposes, last), all of the apostles were sinners in need of a Savior. They had to learn to have faith in Jesus and to grow in their faith. As the future leaders of the church in training, they had to be fully committed to enter into Jesus's mission, to embrace it for themselves, and to make this mission their first priority, subordinating everything else in their lives to this overriding purpose: to spread the message of forgiveness of sins and salvation in Jesus, to establish his messianic community, and to advance the growth of his kingdom on earth. Under Jesus's authority, they were to lead the charge, bringing others along to join them in their mission. They were to give direction to Christ's "body" of which he continues to be the head even after his return to the Father. They were to care for Jesus's "sheep" like shepherds, providing for their spiritual needs, protecting them from doctrinal and other harm. Their leadership position was at the same time a great privilege and a grave responsibility. All but one would eventually give their lives in martyrdom. In this way, they led by example and gave eloquent expression to the all-surpassing value of allegiance to Christ and his kingdom.

### **The Significance of Jesus's Choice of Twelve Male Apostles**

A most obvious fact, which few dispute, is that Jesus chose twelve men to be his apostles.<sup>9</sup> We'll discuss the theological and practical implications of this shortly. For now, it'll suffice to note that this most obvious initial observation from the Gospels of his apostles is that they are men. Jesus appointed twelve men to make up his circle of leadership in the messianic community he established. We'll look at each Gospel in detail below, but what are we to do with Jesus? Some try to present him as a proto-feminist while others reject this proposal as historically implausible. Clearly, if Jesus, as the most important figure in Christianity, pursued a particular agenda with regard to the roles of men and women in God's plan, this would be exceedingly important.<sup>10</sup>

<sup>9</sup>Cf. N. T. Wright, "Women's Service in the Church: The Biblical Basis," conference paper for the symposium "Men, Women and the Church," St. John's College, Durham, September 4, 2004, 5: "Among the many things that need to be said about the gospels is that we gain nothing by ignoring the fact that Jesus chose twelve male apostles." However, he goes on to say that at the cross, the men fled while the women came to the tomb first and were the first to see the risen Jesus, so they served as apostles to the apostles.

<sup>10</sup>Margaret's book *Jesus and the Feminists: Who Do They Say That He Is?* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2008) focuses on Jesus and the Gospels as they are interpreted by various feminists, seeking to uncover and critique how various strands of feminist interpreters read and interpret the Bible. Feminists offer

To be sure, there is a significant difference between Jesus and other first-century rabbis. Jesus certainly treated women with more respect, affirming them as learners of spiritual truth and honoring them as the first witnesses to the resurrection. Yet despite the fact that he was much more positive toward women than contemporary rabbis, Jesus still chose twelve men to form the nucleus of his new messianic community, the church.<sup>11</sup> In terms of leadership, Jesus thus placed

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various explanations for why Jesus chose twelve men. The matter is of little concern to radical feminists who take offense at Jesus's maleness and the fatherhood of God. The fact that Jesus chose twelve male apostles further confirms to them that Christianity is worthy of rejection by all feminists. Jesus and Scripture itself are seen as too patriarchal to be used by feminists.

Other, less radical "reformist" feminists approach the matter differently. In fact, ironically, their approach is diametrically opposite. In her effort to reform Scripture so it can be used by feminists, the matriarch of American feminism, Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, attempts a historical reconstruction of the "Jesus community." In her book *In Memory of Her: A Feminist Theological Reconstruction of Christian Origins* (New York: Crossroad, 1983), Schüssler Fiorenza seeks to demonstrate that Jesus established a "discipleship of equals" among men and women (for a critique, see Köstenberger, *Jesus and the Feminists*, chap. 8). Her conclusion is that, contrary to the biblical witness, Jesus did *not* choose twelve men as apostles. Schüssler Fiorenza can arrive at this conclusion, which flatly contradicts the New Testament Gospels, by employing a "hermeneutic of suspicion." This hermeneutic is akin to a conspiracy theory claiming that because the Bible was written by males, the biblical writers suppressed any evidence of women leaders in the early Christian community. Viewed from such a vantage point, it is of no consequence that there is little (if any) historical evidence to support such a position. After all, males wrote Scripture in an attempt to keep women in subjection, so it's only to be expected that they would eradicate any countervailing evidence. Schüssler Fiorenza also argues that Jesus was a prophet of Sophia (wisdom personified as a female deity), a rather bizarre interpretation of Luke 7:35 ("Wisdom is justified by all her children") unsupported by any biblical texts (see her *Jesus: Miriam's Child, Sophia's Prophet: Critical Issues in Feminist Christology* [New York: Continuum, 1994]).

In addition, many reformist feminists point to neglected feminine aspects of God. They argue that Yahweh was originally a fertility goddess, again without any hard evidence to support such a claim (their primary point of reference is Prov. 8:22–31, where wisdom is *personified* *literarily* as a woman at God's side at creation). Strikingly, in recent years even most feminists have rejected Schüssler Fiorenza's proposal because it simply cannot be sustained historically. John H. Elliot, "Jesus Was Not an Egalitarian: A Critique of an Anachronistic and Idealist Theory," *Biblical Theology Bulletin* 32 (2002): 75–91, takes Fiorenza head on, as an egalitarian himself. He argues that his fellow feminists are guilty of anachronism and wishful thinking when they project various egalitarian ideas back onto Jesus. Kathleen Corley, a member of the Jesus Seminar, wrote a book on women and the historical Jesus in 2002 in which she argues that "the notion that Jesus established an anti-patriarchal movement or a 'discipleship of equals' is a myth posited to buttress modern Christian social engineering" (*Women and the Historical Jesus: Feminist Myths of Christian Origins* [Santa Rosa, CA: Polebridge, 2002], 1). This is rather strong language, especially coming from a fellow feminist scholar. In essence, what Corley is saying is that Schüssler Fiorenza posits her view of an egalitarian Jesus movement in order to validate her feminist agenda. But as Corley rightly notes, this does not qualify as responsible scholarly research. Other feminist scholars have been similarly critical.

As you can see, reformist feminists are rather conflicted and don't quite know what to do with Jesus. Some, like Schüssler Fiorenza, try to present him as a (proto) feminist, while others, as mentioned, reject her proposal as historically implausible. Their efforts do show the intensity of effort expended to enlist Jesus in the feminist cause. Clearly, Jesus is the most important figure in Christianity. If you could show that Jesus pursued a feminist agenda, this would make a huge difference in the debate on gender roles. In the end, however, the effort on the part of some feminists such as Fiorenza to enlist Jesus in their cause has largely been unsuccessful.

<sup>11</sup> Helpful resources on the Jewish and Greco-Roman background include Everett Ferguson, *Backgrounds of Early Christianity*, 3rd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2003); James S. Jeffers, *The Greco-Roman World of the New Testament Era: Exploring the Background of Early Christianity* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1999); and the *Zondervan Illustrated Bible Backgrounds Commentary*, 5 vols., ed. Clinton E. Arnold (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2001). See also chap. 1 in Charles Ryrie, *The Role of Women in the Church*, 2nd ed. (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2011). Lynn H. Cohick, *Women in the World of the Earliest Christians: Illuminating Ancient Ways of Life* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2009), is "historically engaging but not

authority into the hands of men. This is in continuity with the Old Testament pattern of male leadership where authority was vested in male kings or priests. Jesus continued this practice and called these twelve men “apostles,” explicitly patterning this core group after the twelve tribes of Israel.

Did Jesus choose males only as apostles merely for pragmatic reasons? Some say that it would have been difficult for women to travel

“To be sure, there is a significant difference between Jesus and other first-century rabbis. Jesus certainly treated women with more respect, affirming them as learners of spiritual truth and honoring them as the first witnesses to the resurrection.”

with Jesus because of feminine needs and the perceived impropriety of women traveling closely with men.<sup>12</sup> They suggest that Jesus chose close male followers only or primarily for pragmatic reasons such as ease of travel arrangements, not because male leadership was an essential and indispensable part of God's design for men and women.

Though there may be a legitimate question raised here, Jesus certainly would have found a way to accommodate women traveling with him if he had really wanted to elevate women to leadership roles in his messianic community. What is more, women did in fact travel with Jesus (see Luke 8:2–3), albeit not as members of the Twelve.

So, what if Jesus knew his contemporaries weren't ready for women in leadership and so accommodated himself to the prevailing culture of the time? The obvious response is that Jesus wasn't known to compromise his convictions at all, especially when an important principle was at stake.<sup>13</sup> To the contrary, he was quite willing to go against cultural norms when truth was at issue. He was not known to choose the path of least resistance merely to avoid conflict. In fact, it's highly unlikely that

theologically neutral”; see the review by Benjamin L. Merkle in *Journal of Biblical Manhood and Womanhood* 16 (Spring 2011): 51–53, who notes that Cohick “consistently interprets the passages in ways that lean heavily toward egalitarianism” (p. 52, with several examples).

<sup>12</sup>See, e.g., Ruth A. Tucker and Walter L. Liefeld, *Daughters of the Church: Women and Ministry from New Testament Times to the Present* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1987), 46.

<sup>13</sup>Some might argue that slavery and women's submission are both cultural expressions that Jesus didn't formally or directly preach against, knowing that the gospel would eventually cause people to reject both. But see Robert W. Yarbrough, “Progressive and Historic: The Hermeneutics of 1 Timothy 2:9–15,” in *Women in the Church*, 2nd ed., ed. Andreas J. Köstenberger and Thomas R. Schreiner (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2005), 139–42, who notes that (1) neither God nor Scripture ordained slavery, while marriage and men's spiritual leadership were ordained by God; (2) slavery in Israel generally had a six-year limit, but no time limit is stated for men to continue as husbands to particular wives or as elders of churches; (3) in New Testament times, Paul advises slaves to gain their freedom if possible (1 Cor. 7:21), but he gives no such advice to wives or to people in churches with male leaders.

Jesus would have compromised merely because people weren't ready for change. He is known to have cleansed the temple in dramatic, prophetic fashion in order to challenge the abuses of the religious establishment and consistently challenged the Jewish leaders of his day in other passionate and resolute ways. If Jesus had wanted to include women leaders in his apostolic circle out of principle, he would have done so. He was the Messiah, the Son of God, God's representative to humanity. If there had been a new pattern of leadership that God wanted to establish with regard to gender roles, Jesus would have established it.

Still others assert that Jesus's choice of twelve male apostles was just a cultural thing. They draw attention to the fact that just as the Twelve were all male, they were also all Jewish. If all-male leadership is required, shouldn't Jewish leadership be required as well? However, it is not balanced logic to put the apostles' maleness and their Jewishness on the same level, because they belong

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in two different categories. The apostles' Jewishness is not a timeless entity but a salvation-historical phenomenon at the time of Jesus that reflects God's long-term plan for his people. According to this plan, Abraham's offspring, Jesus, who was a Jew, was to serve as a channel of blessing to all of humanity. So there is a movement from the Jews (Israel through Jesus and the apostles) to the church at large (consisting of both Jewish and non-Jewish believers). On the other hand, the biblical pattern of male leadership is constant throughout Scripture.

Also, are some making too much of the distinction between apostles and disciples to find a way to exclude women from leadership? Jesus not only had male disciples but female ones as well (e.g., Luke 8:2–3: Mary Magdalene, Joanna wife of Chuza, Susanna, and many others), right? The distinction between "apostle" used for the Twelve (leaders) and "disciple" used for both male and female followers of Jesus, actually, is biblically accurate and important.<sup>14</sup> Though some

<sup>14</sup>Regarding Paul's use of the term *apostolos* with reference to Junia in Rom. 16:7, see the discussion in chap. 5 below.

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imply that Jesus’s inner circle was gender neutral, since he did have female followers, this minimizes the significance of the Twelve. It blurs the distinction between the apostles and other disciples who followed Jesus. As mentioned, the number twelve likely has symbolic significance, connecting the apostles with the twelve tribes of Israel.

“Jesus’s concern to reach out to the lowly in society and his desire to elevate them and minister to them wasn’t limited to women but more broadly encompassed those of other races, gender, [and] socio-economic status.”

In closing, it may be helpful to note that generally the focus in the Gospels is not just on women, or gender, but on the fact that Jesus was open to people of all social classes. In Jesus’s day, women unfortunately would have been grouped with people who made up the lower classes of society or otherwise lacked status such as children, the poor, or tax collectors. The Gospels make plain that Jesus didn’t look down on anyone but treated all people—including women—with dignity and respect. This is so important! Jesus’s concern to reach out to the lowly in society and his desire to elevate them and minister to them wasn’t limited to women but more broadly encompassed those of other races, gender, socioeconomic status, and so forth.<sup>15</sup>

Table 3.2: Couldn’t Jesus Have Chosen Women as Apostles?

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|---|
| <ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. Maybe Jesus chose only male apostles for pragmatic reasons, such as ease of travel arrangements.</li><li>2. Did Jesus accommodate himself to first-century Jewish culture because people in his day weren’t ready for female apostles?</li><li>3. Isn’t it just a cultural thing? Just like the Twelve were all male, they were also all Jewish. If it’s required that we have all-male leaders, doesn’t that mean church leaders today should all be Jewish?</li><li>4. Jesus had not only male disciples but female ones as well. The distinction between “apostle” used for the Twelve (leaders) and “disciple” used for both male and female followers of Jesus is overrated. There should be no restrictions placed on women being leaders in the church.</li></ol> |
|---|

<sup>15</sup>Compare Paul’s statement in Gal. 3:28 that in Christ there is neither Jew nor Gentile, slave nor free, male nor female, but all are one in Christ, which is a logical implication drawn from Jesus’s own practice during his earthly ministry. See Andreas J. Köstenberger, “The Church according to the Gospels,” in *The Community of Jesus: A Theology of the Church*, ed. Kendell H. Easley and Christopher W. Morgan (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2013), 35–63. Once this broader picture is understood, it is difficult to conceive of a compelling rationale as to why Jesus chose twelve male apostles other than to form the nucleus of his messianic community as the foundation for the leadership of the ensuing New Testament church.

Table 3.3: Probably Not. Here's Why!

1. The women who supported Jesus did actually accompany him on at least some of his travels. It would have been likely for Jesus to call such women "apostles" and include them among the Twelve if he had wanted to.
2. It's uncharacteristic of Jesus to bow to cultural expectations, especially if an important principle (such as male-female equality) was at stake.
3. It's not fair or accurate to put the apostles' maleness and their Jewishness on the same level, because they're two different things. The apostles' maleness reflects a constant trait. Their Jewishness reflects a particular stage of salvation history of God's plan to bless his people.
4. The apostles were distinct from the disciples and as such were identified as the core *leadership* group in Jesus's new messianic community, the nascent church. "Apostle" is in fact a technical term used in the Gospels for Jesus's core leadership group. Disciples were *followers*, but not necessarily future leaders.

## Other Men in the Gospels

As we peruse the four Gospels in our Bibles, we read about a considerable number of men (and, of course, women) who are part of Jesus's story. We've already considered the Twelve, who constituted Jesus's primary focus, and have seen that they were all male in keeping with the biblical pattern of leadership. While our study of other significant male characters in the Gospels is not necessarily as relevant with regard to the question of men in leadership, it will round out the picture of men Jesus encountered during his public ministry and the kind of interactions he had with them. Essentially, these instances fall into two categories: (1) men mentioned in the narrative portions of one or more of the canonical Gospels; and (2) male characters in Jesus's parables.

### Individual Men or Groups of Men in the Gospel Narratives

There are numerous male characters in the Gospel narratives that form part of Jesus's story. Jesus had many encounters with representatives of the Pharisees and the Sadducees. In some cases, the encounters were neutral or even friendly, though in many (if not most) instances they were adversarial. Jesus also faced Pontius Pilate, the Roman governor;

as well as the Jewish high priests Caiaphas and Annas toward the end of his earthly ministry.<sup>16</sup> In addition, Jesus met countless male individuals during the course of his three-and-a-half-year ministry (as John hyperbolically reminds us, if all of these were written down, the whole world couldn't contain the books that would need to be written; John 21:25).

In Matthew, Jesus is shown to meet several men who are in dire need of healing: a leper; a paralytic; a man with a withered hand; a man who is unable to speak; two sets of two blind men; two demon-possessed men; and an epileptic, demon-possessed boy; as well as a centurion whose son was paralyzed. Jesus healed them all. In a different type of encounter, at his transfiguration, Jesus met with Moses and Elijah, both of whom had worked major miracles in Israel's history. Mark records Jesus's meeting many of the same people, as well as an encounter with Jairus, a synagogue ruler and concerned father, whose twelve-year-old daughter had died (Jesus raised her from the dead). Luke, too, features many of the same individuals. In addition, he introduces us to Zacchaeus the tax collector, who climbs down from a tree in order to meet Jesus and to invite him to his house.

In distinction from the other Gospels, John largely carves out his own path, recounting at some length Jesus's encounters with several men (and women; see below) not featured in those Gospels. The first such encounter is that with Nicodemus, a member of the Jewish ruling council, who paid Jesus a nightly visit. Other encounters include those with an official whose son was ill; an invalid man who had been lame for thirty-eight years before he met Jesus; a man born blind (all of them healed by Jesus); and, most famously, Lazarus, who had been dead for four days and was miraculously raised from the dead by Jesus. All these amazing events revealed Jesus as the life giver, God in the flesh.

What these various encounters recorded in the Gospels show is that Jesus served these men by meeting their respective needs, whether for healing, forgiveness, or instruction. He treated them with compassion, even a memorable character such as the rich young man who

<sup>16</sup>On Jesus's dealings with the Jews and Pilate, see Andreas J. Köstenberger, "What Is Truth? Pilate's Question to Jesus in Its Johannine and Larger Biblical Context," in *Whatever Happened to Truth?*, ed. Andreas J. Köstenberger (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2005), 19–51.

wanted to follow Jesus but couldn't get himself to part with his wealth. Jesus even reached out to the hated tax collectors who were widely considered traitors, including Levi/Matthew (whom he even included among his apostles) and Zacchaeus. Not only did Jesus eventually die for people—he truly loved all the men and women whom he met during the span of his three-year public ministry on earth.

Table 3.4: Jesus's Encounters with Individual Men (except for the Twelve) in the Gospels (Selected List)

<p><b>Matthew:</b></p> <p>Leper (8:1–4)</p> <p>Centurion (8:5–13)</p> <p>Two demon-possessed men (8:28–34)</p> <p>Paralytic (9:1–8)</p> <p>Two blind men (9:27–31; 20:29–34)</p> <p>Man unable to speak (9:32–34)</p> <p>Man with withered hand (12:9–14)</p> <p>Moses and Elijah (17:1–8)</p> <p>Epileptic demon-possessed boy (17:14–21)</p> <p>Rich young man (19:16–22)</p>
<p><b>Mark:</b></p> <p>Man with unclean spirit (1:21–28)</p> <p>Leper (1:40–45)</p> <p>Paralytic (2:1–12)</p> <p>Man with withered hand (3:1–6)</p> <p>Demon-possessed man (5:1–20)</p> <p>Jairus, synagogue ruler (5:21–24, 35–43)</p> <p>Deaf man (7:31–37)</p> <p>Moses and Elijah (9:2–13)</p> <p>Boy with unclean spirit (9:14–29)</p> <p>Rich young man (10:17–33)</p> <p>Blind beggar Bartimaeus (10:46–52)</p>
<p><b>Luke:</b></p> <p>Man with unclean demon (4:31–37)</p> <p>Leper (5:12–16)</p> <p>Paralytic (5:17–26)</p> <p>Man with withered hand (6:6–11)</p>

<p>Centurion (7:1–10)                  Jairus (8:40–42, 49–56)                  Moses and Elijah (9:28–36)                  Boy with unclean spirit (9:37–43)                  Man with dropsy (14:1–6)                  Rich young man (18:18–30)                  Blind beggar (18:36–43)                  Zacchaeus (19:1–10)</p>
<p><b>John:</b>                  Nicodemus (3:1–15)                  Official whose son was ill (4:46–54)                  Invalid man (5:1–15)                  Man born blind (9)                  Lazarus (11:1–44; 12:1–8)</p>

**Male Characters in Jesus's Parables**

Jesus's parables display a rich variety of both male and female characters, serving as identification figures for those who listened to them. The male characters can be grouped into several spheres of life: (1) farming, fishing, and shepherding: sower, man planting vineyard, fig tree, vinedresser, workers in vineyard, fishermen, shepherd; (2) construction, commerce, and domestic: builder of a house, man building tower, merchant, moneylender, debtors, tax collector, manager; (3) familial: father and son(s), servants; (4) public life: host, man giving banquet, king giving banquet for son's wedding, servants; (5) named figures or members of groups: Levite, Pharisee, Lazarus (poor man); (6) other: master going on a journey, traveler, priest.

The stories told by Jesus give us a fascinating glimpse into life in first-century Palestine. There are references to men as masters of the house, kings, fathers and sons, tenants, servants, messengers, doorkeepers, and banquet guests. We learn about a variety of professions held by men in Jesus's day: farming, fishing, shepherding, construction, or commerce. We hear about men throwing a feast for their son's wedding, men planting a vineyard, and men going on a journey. Clearly, today most of us no longer live in the type of agrarian society

that characterized first-century Palestine, but the occupations and activities of the men depicted by Jesus reflect a culture in which men worked hard to provide for their own.

Table 3.5: Male Characters in Jesus’s Parables

<b>In Matthew, Mark, and Luke</b>	
Bridegroom	Matt. 9:15; Mark 2:19–20; Luke 5:33–39
Strong man	Matt. 12:29–30; Mark 3:22–27; Luke 11:21–23
Sower	Matt. 13:1–9, 18–23; Mark 4:1–9, 13–20; Luke 8:4–8, 11–15
Man planting vineyard, tenants, servants, son	Matt. 21:33–46; Mark 12:1–12; Luke 20:9–19
<b>Only in Matthew and Luke</b>	
Father and son	Matt. 7:9–11; Luke 11:11–13
Builder	Matt. 7:24–27; Luke 6:47–49
Shepherd	Matt. 18:12–14; Luke 15:1–7
King, son, servants	Matt. 22:1–14; Luke 14:15–24
Master of house, thief	Matt. 24:42–44; Luke 12:39–40
Master, two kinds of servants	Matt. 24:45–51; Luke 12:42–46
Master, servants	Matt. 25:14–30; Luke 19:11–27
<b>Only in Mark and Luke</b>	
Man going on journey, servants, doorkeeper	Mark 13:34–37; Luke 12:35–38
<b>Only in Matthew</b>	
Man finding treasure	Matt. 13:44
Merchant finding pearl	Matt. 13:45–46
Fisherman	Matt. 13:47–50

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Owner of a house	Matt. 13:52
King, servants	Matt. 18:23–35
Vineyard owner, workers	Matt. 20:1–16
Father, two sons	Matt. 21:28–32
Shepherd	Matt. 25:31–46
<b>Only in Mark</b>	
Sower	Mark 4:26–29, 30–32
<b>Only in Luke</b>	
Moneylender, two debtors	Luke 7:41–42
Traveler, priest, Levite, Samaritan	Luke 10:30–37
Persistent friend	Luke 11:5–8
Rich fool	Luke 12:13–21
Man planting fig tree, vinedresser	Luke 13:6–9
Host	Luke 14:7–14
Man giving banquet, servants, guests*	Luke 14:16–24
Man building tower	Luke 14:28–30
King going to war	Luke 14:31–33
Father, two sons/heirs	Luke 15:11–32
Shrewd manager	Luke 16:1–8
Rich man, Lazarus	Luke 16:19–31
Humble servant	Luke 17:7–10
Pharisee, tax collector	Luke 18:9–14

*\*Of those prospective guests, one excused himself, saying he had bought a field and must go see it; another said he had bought five yoke of oxen and must examine them; another said he had married a wife.*

### Other Teaching on Men and Women

In addition to featuring a variety of men and women in his parables, Jesus teaches on issues pertaining to men and women at various other junctures during his public ministry. At one such occasion, Jesus likened male lust to adultery (Matt. 5:28–32). At another occasion, he responded to a question addressed to him by Pharisees on the topic of adultery and divorce (Matt. 19:1–12; Mark 10:1–12; Luke 16:18). Jesus affirmed God’s original design of lifelong marriage between one man and one woman and pointed out that Mosaic divorce legislation was only a concession to human hardness, not a legitimization of divorce. At yet another occasion, Jesus noted that as a result of his call to discipleship, loyalties in the natural family may be divided, setting son against father, daughter against mother, and so forth (Matt. 10:35; Luke 12:53; cf. Mic. 7:6). Once Jesus was asked if people were going to marry in the resurrection (Matt. 22:23–33; Mark 12:18–27; Luke 20:27–40). Jesus replied that in heaven, people are going to be like the angels. In this way, Jesus significantly added to our understanding of male-female identity, relationships, and roles.

Table 3.6: Jesus’s Teaching Concerning Men and Women

<p>Jesus teaches on adultery and divorce (Matt. 5:28–32; 19:1–12; Mark 10:1–12; Luke 16:18)</p> <p>Daughter set against mother, etc. (Matt. 10:35; Luke 12:53)</p> <p>Jesus on marriage in the resurrection (Matt. 22:23–33; Mark 12:18–27; Luke 20:27–40)</p>
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### Women in the Gospels

Now that we’ve assessed the significance of Jesus’s maleness, surveyed the members of the Twelve, discussed the significance of his selection of twelve men as apostles, and studied other men in the Gospels and male characters in Jesus’s parables, we’re ready to address some of the most relevant texts in the Gospels that show Jesus interacting with or teaching about women. After this, we’ll look at each Gospel individually in order to delineate the particular contributions Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John make to our understanding of the big picture of

the biblical theology of men's and women's roles, including regarding their service in positions of leadership. A concluding survey will attempt to tie together the various insights derived from a close study of Jesus's interaction with and teaching on women.<sup>17</sup>

### Individual Women or Groups of Women in the Gospel Narratives (Synopsis)

The Gospels feature a considerable number of women who were grateful recipients of Jesus's healing, whether personally or of a loved one. These women include Peter's mother-in-law (Matt. 8:14–15; Mark 1:30–31; Luke 4:38–39), the widow at Nain (Luke 7:11–15), Jairus's daughter and an unnamed woman with blood flow (Matt. 9:18–26; Mark 5:22–43; Luke 8:40–56), a girl who had been possessed by a demon (Matt. 15:21–28; Mark 7:24–30), and a crippled woman (Luke 13:10–17). Jesus also included several female characters alongside male characters in his parables and taught about subjects of concern for women.<sup>18</sup> In addition, the Gospels record several instances where Jesus engaged in more extensive interaction with women, such as the Samaritan woman or Mary and Martha, and make reference to a group of devoted female followers of Jesus who show their loyalty all the way to the cross and beyond.

Table 3.7: Passages on Jesus and Women in the Gospels (Selected List)

Jesus and his mother at the Cana wedding (John 2:1–12)
Jesus talks with a Samaritan woman (John 4:1–42)
Jesus heals Peter's mother-in-law (Matt. 8:14–15; Mark 1:30–31; Luke 4:38–39)
Jesus raises the widow's son at Nain (Luke 7:11–15)
Jesus's family comes to take him home (Matt. 12:46–50; Mark 3:20–21, 31–35; Luke 8:19–21)
Jesus raises Jairus's daughter, heals woman with blood flow (Matt. 9:18–26; Mark 5:22–43; Luke 8:40–56)
Jesus is anointed by a sinful woman (Luke 7:36–50)
A group of women supports Jesus and the Twelve (Luke 8:2–3)
Jesus exorcises demon from a girl (Matt. 15:21–28; Mark 7:24–30)

<sup>17</sup>For more details on the tables below, see Köstenberger, *Jesus and the Feminists*, chap. 14.

<sup>18</sup>See the lists above.

Jesus teaches Martha an object lesson (Luke 10:38–42)  
 A woman calls Jesus’s mother “blessed” (Luke 11:27–28)  
 Jesus commends the Queen of the South (Matt. 12:42; Luke 11:31)  
 Jesus heals a crippled woman on the Sabbath (Luke 13:10–17)  
 The request of the mother of the sons of Zebedee (Matt. 20:20–28; see Mark 10:35–45)  
 Teaching on widows and the widow’s mite (Mark 12:40–44; Luke 20:47–21:4)  
 Pregnant, nursing mothers in the tribulation (Matt. 24:19–21; Mark 13:17–19)  
 Mary and Martha grieve for Lazarus (John 11:1–44)  
 Mary anoints Jesus (Matt. 26:6–13; Mark 14:3–9; John 12:1–8)  
 The wailing Jerusalem women (Luke 23:27–31)  
 The women near the cross (Matt. 27:55–56; Mark 15:40–41; Luke 23:49; John 19:25–27)  
 Mary Magdalene and others at Jesus’s burial and as witnesses of the resurrection (Matt. 27:61; 28:1–11; Mark 15:47–16:8; Luke 23:55–24:12; John 20:1–18)

*The Samaritan woman.* Let’s now take a closer look at a few of these women. In John’s Gospel, we read about Jesus’s conversation with a Samaritan woman (John 4:1–42). This account shows how the Samaritan woman serves as a witness to Jesus and recruits others in her village to hear his teaching. Does Jesus commission the woman for this task, and does this suggest that Jesus is formally appointing her to a leadership position in the Christian community? The narrative really only indicates that the woman bears witness to others about Jesus. This passage certainly lends support to the notion that women, like men, should passionately share their faith. At the same time, it would be anachronistic to suggest that the woman occupied a leadership position in the New Testament church, if for no other reason than that the church hadn’t yet come into being at that time.

Another significant element of the story is Jesus’s breaking of several social conventions in order to share the gospel with this woman. Entering into a prolonged, in-depth public conversation with a woman wasn’t the norm for a first-century rabbi or any respectable Jewish male.<sup>19</sup>

<sup>19</sup>For primary and secondary sources, see Andreas J. Köstenberger, *John*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2004), 159, who mentions that some rabbis (such as

We see the disciples at their return surprised to find Jesus in conversation with this woman (v. 27). He takes the time to speak with her since he cares for her as a person in need of salvation. The fact that she is a Samaritan suggests that Jesus isn't reaching out across only gender but also racial lines. Salvation-historical factors are likely at work as well, since Samaritans occupied a middle position between Jews and Gentiles. Jesus likely here sets the example for the early church to engage in missionary outreach in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and to the ends of the earth (Acts 1:8).

*Mary and Martha.* While the account of the Samaritan woman is found only in John's Gospel, all four Gospels feature accounts of Jesus's interaction with Mary and Martha, two unmarried sisters who lived in Bethany just outside the city of Jerusalem (Luke 10:38–42; John 11:1–44; Matt. 26:6–13; Mark 14:3–9; John 12:1–8). The story of Jesus's conversation with Martha and her sister Mary in Luke 10:38–42, in particular, provides a fascinating glimpse into Jesus's private dealings with women. In her book *Jesus and the Feminists*, Margaret registers the following observation:

Rather than prioritizing women's household duties, Jesus encouraged women to learn from him and become his followers. However, we must be careful not to take an instance from the Gospel narrative and invest it simplistically with normative significance. All that is said here is that Jesus rejected Martha's complaint that Mary did not help with household duties. It hardly follows that Jesus was a feminist who rejected women's managing their households and called on them to serve as pastors or elders.<sup>20</sup>

Jesus obviously isn't condemning Martha simply for preparing a meal (Simon's mother-in-law did so without drawing any rebuke from Jesus; see Matt. 8:14–15). Jesus certainly wasn't opposed to women staying at home and ensuring that their households are in order. It is

Yose ben Yohanan) "held that to talk too much to a woman, even one's own wife, was a waste of time, diverting one's attention from the study of the Torah. Potentially, this habit could grow to be a great evil, even leading to hell (*m. 'Abot* 1.5)." Other instances where Jesus talked to women in public include Luke 7:36–50; 10:38–42; and John 11:17–40.

<sup>20</sup>Köstenberger, *Jesus and the Feminists*, 196, quoting Stanley J. Grenz and Denise Muir Kjesbo, *Women in the Church: A Biblical Theology of Women in Ministry* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1995), 75, and Aída B. Spencer, *Beyond the Curse: Women Called to Ministry* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1985), 60–61.

a narrative account of a conflict that historically arose between two sisters. Martha is complaining because Mary isn't helping. Jesus settles a dispute between two sisters by noting that what Mary was doing was seizing the opportunity to learn from Jesus, which showed proper discernment and right priorities.

The account illustrates Jesus's affirmation of women receiving spiritual instruction. In the Jewish culture of Jesus's day, girls were often not given the same opportunity as boys to be educated in the Scriptures.<sup>21</sup> Jesus is countercultural and pointedly commends Mary's desire to listen to his teaching and to learn from him. The point Luke is making is that Christianity is very open for women and individuals from every class and background to come to Jesus. Women should have access to Jesus and be able to learn from him.<sup>22</sup> Mary serves as a great example of a woman who is open to spiritual truth and to grow in her knowledge of the Scriptures.

"The point Luke is making is that Christianity is very open to women and individuals from every class and background to come to Jesus. Women should have access to Jesus and be able to learn from him."

Later, John records the raising of Lazarus by Jesus in an account that features Lazarus's sisters Mary and Martha (John 11:1–44). Apparently, all of them were unmarried and lived together in an extended household. In this account Lazarus has died, and his sisters are grieving. Jesus is close to the family, and they believe that if he had come earlier, he could have prevented the tragedy. Martha, significantly, utters the confession that Jesus is the Messiah and Son of God, anticipating the purpose of John's entire Gospel.<sup>23</sup>

Shortly before his death, Jesus visits the house of Mary and Martha again, and on that occasion Mary anoints Jesus for burial (Matt. 26:6–13; Mark 14:3–9; John 12:1–8). In the process, she breaks a bottle of expensive perfume, extravagantly "wasting" almost an entire year's worth of wages. Judas the traitor objects to Mary's actions, contending

<sup>21</sup>Rainer Riesner, *Jesus als Lehrer*, 3rd ed. (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1988), focuses on first-century Jewish education. Typically only boys were given the privilege of being trained in the Scriptures.

<sup>22</sup>At the same time, the account says nothing about Mary being a teacher or leader. Contra Wright, "Women's Service," 4, who claims that Mary here is shown to invade "the male part of the house" and that she is a student in order to be a teacher, a rabbi, herself.

<sup>23</sup>This is remarkable because in the other Gospels it is Peter who utters the pivotal confession. Peter issues a remarkable acknowledgment of Jesus's identity in John's Gospel as well (John 6:68–69), but Martha's statement is closer to epitomizing John's purpose; in fact, the two are identical (John 11:27; 20:31).

that the money could instead have been given to the poor. John explicitly contrasts Judas's disingenuous protest with Mary's act of service.

Unlike Judas, Mary of Bethany intuitively understood that this was a propitious moment. Jesus affirms the rightness of Mary's actions in anointing him for burial. Without fully realizing the significance of her act, Mary expressed her loyalty to Jesus, and her story continues to be told to this very day, in keeping with Jesus's prediction. Mary's example shows that Jesus loved women, and many responded to him with great devotion and unusual faith.

### A Group of Women Supporters of Jesus and the Twelve

Luke alone records the presence of a devoted group of women followers supporting Jesus and the Twelve (Luke 8:2–3). There were thus at least two distinct groups surrounding and supporting Jesus: the twelve apostles and a group of women who traveled with Jesus, at least some of the time, to support him and his (male) followers in their ministry. We encounter these women again at the cross. Mary Magdalene, who later became the first witness of the resurrection, had seven demons exorcised from her by Jesus. Only three women are named in the account (Mary Magdalene, Joanna the wife of Chuza, and Susanna), but there were doubtless several others.

The account does indicate that some female followers of Jesus (such as Joanna) were apparently more prominent, being married to government or other high-ranking officials. Luke noted this most likely for apologetic purposes in an effort to show that not all Christians were members of the lower classes of society. There were many intelligent, prominent, well-connected people (including women) who placed their faith in Jesus and followed him.

These women's prominence on account of their husband's position, however, does not necessarily make them leaders in Jesus's community or in the early church. For the most part, these women were prominent because they were married to notorious individuals or government officials. Their presence with Jesus suggests that they had a genuine, deep commitment to Jesus and his cause. The present group is for all practical purposes identical to the following group of women mentioned as being near the cross and at the empty tomb subsequent

to the resurrection. Women today can be greatly encouraged by this group of female disciples who were deeply devoted to Jesus's cause.

### The Women Near the Cross and at the Empty Tomb, Including Mary Magdalene and Others

All four Gospels recount in varying degrees of detail the presence of a group of women at Jesus's crucifixion and burial (Matt. 27:55–56; Mark 15:40–41; Luke 23:49; John 19:25–27) and their return to the tomb in order to anoint Jesus's body after the end of the Sabbath (Matt. 27:61; 28:1–11; Mark 15:47–16:8; Luke 23:55–24:12; John 20:1–18).<sup>24</sup> Luke's account is especially instructive. Jesus is shown to appoint the twelve apostles at the very beginning of his Gospel while his women followers are first mentioned near the midpoint of his narrative (Luke 8:2–3). The narrative closes with everyone clustered together, including the women who had followed Jesus faithfully all the way to the cross.

It's unlikely that Jesus's first followers would have invented the account of Jesus appearing first to Mary Magdalene subsequent to his resurrection. No one seeking to validate the Christian faith would have invented a woman's testimony to Jesus's resurrection. By appearing first to a woman, the risen Jesus implicitly challenged the patriarchal culture of his day that didn't consider women as viable legal witnesses. Interestingly, John's statement at 21:14 (HCSB), "This was now the third time Jesus appeared to his disciples after he was raised from the dead," doesn't count Jesus's appearance to Mary Magdalene, most likely because she wasn't a member of the Twelve, and here "disciples" is used to denote the apostles (cf. 1 Cor. 15:3–8).

All the Gospels make clear that none of the women, similar to Jesus's male followers, expected Jesus to rise from the dead. When they went to the tomb, they were expecting to find Jesus's dead body. It was the custom for women in that culture to prepare the body for burial, and they hadn't been able to finish that task because of the Sabbath. As devoted followers of Jesus, they returned in order

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<sup>24</sup>For a discussion of the women at the cross and the empty tomb, see Andreas J. Köstenberger and Justin Taylor, *The Final Days of Jesus: The Most Important Week of the Most Important Person Who Ever Lived* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2014) 153, 162, 167, 177–80.

to complete that assignment within culturally prescribed norms. Mary Magdalene's devotion was rewarded by the appearance of the risen Jesus.

**Female Characters in Jesus's Parables**

Along with men, Jesus featured numerous women or groups of women as characters in his parables. These female characters include: the woman baking (Matt. 13:33; Luke 13:20–21); the woman who lost a coin (Luke 15:8–10); the persistent widow (Luke 18:1–8); two women grinding at a mill (Matt. 24:41; Luke 17:35); and the ten virgins (Matt. 25:1–13). In many cases, Jesus, when telling a parable, would use a male and a female character side by side, evidently so that both his male and his female listeners could better relate to his teaching. This pattern is particularly evident in Luke's Gospel (see further below). It's certainly remarkable that Jesus, in the patriarchal culture of first-century Palestine, went out of his way to teach women about the kingdom he had come to inaugurate. This shows that he genuinely sought to appeal to and attract female as well as male followers.

Table 3.8: Women in Jesus's Parables

The woman baking (Matt. 13:33; Luke 13:20–21)
The woman who lost a coin (Luke 15:8–10)
The persistent widow (Luke 18:1–8)
Two women grinding at a mill (Matt. 24:41; Luke 17:35)
The parable of the ten virgins (Matt. 25:1–13)

**Passages on Women in Each Individual Gospel**

Now that we've briefly surveyed some of the most important passages in the Gospels in synoptic format that feature Jesus's encounters with women, we'll look at the Gospels one at a time in order to determine their distinctive contribution to our understanding of Jesus's treatment of and teaching on women.<sup>25</sup>

<sup>25</sup>Margaret has included complete tables in her book *Jesus and the Feminists*, chap. 14. For this reason it will be sufficient here to limit ourselves to providing selected lists that feature the most important references to women in each of the Gospels.

Table 3.9: Selected Passages on Women in Matthew

Matthew	Woman character(s)	Description
1:3, 5, 6, 16*	Tamar, Rahab, Ruth, Bathsheba, Mary	Jesus's genealogy
1:18–25*	Mary (Joseph's perspective)	Jesus's birth
10:35	Daughter vs. mother, etc.	No peace but division
13:33*	A woman baking	Kingdom parable
15:21–28	Syrophoenician woman and daughter	Demon exorcised, faith
20:20–21	Mother of sons of Zebedee	Request on behalf of her sons
24:41*	Two women grinding at a mill	Coming of Son of Man
25:1–13*	Ten virgins	Parable on watchfulness
26:6–13	Woman at Bethany	Anointing Jesus
27:55–56	Mary Magdalene, Mary mother of James and of Joses, mother of sons of Zebedee	Watching from a distance; Had followed Jesus in Galilee
28:1–11	Mary Magdalene, other Mary	Set out to anoint Jesus's body

\*Only in Matthew

### Matthew

Matthew's emphasis on five women in Jesus's genealogy is intriguing. What these women seem to have in common is the appearance or reality of scandal. In Mary's case, it was only the appearance of scandal related to the virgin birth. Joseph is about to divorce Mary, suspecting that she broke the betrothal, and Matthew is trying to make the point that the appearance or reality of scandal in conjunction with God's work has precedent in salvation history.

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Tamar played the part of a prostitute in order to maintain her husband's name. Ruth slept beside Boaz all night, conveying the appearance, although not the reality, of scandal. Bathsheba, on the other hand, was involved in a very real, high-profile, and destructive scandal with King David. By including these five women, Matthew sets the background for Mary's virgin conception of Jesus, in keeping with the Jewish belief in the importance of patterns in history.

Other explanations have been offered for what might unify the five women, but regardless of the explanation, these commonalities have little (if anything) to do with the question of women in leadership. The reason why Matthew includes these women in Jesus's genealogy is most likely not that he has an exalted view of women but rather that he wants to provide the proper backdrop for his narration of the virgin birth of Jesus.

In the body of the Gospel, women are mentioned as characters in the narrative (Mary the mother of Jesus, Mary Magdalene) and in particular as recipients of healing (the Syrophoenician woman). On the whole, Jesus's encounters with women narrated in this Gospel show women in familiar roles as mothers and working in the domestic realm. There is no recognizable special emphasis on women.

Table 3.10: Selected Passages on Women in Mark

Mark	Woman character(s)	Description
7:24–30	Syrophoenician woman and daughter	Demon exorcized, faith
12:41–44	Poor widow	Commended for giving
14:3–9	Woman at Bethany	Anointing Jesus
15:40–41	Mary Magdalene, Mary mother of James and of Joses, Salome, and other women	Looking on from a distance at cross
16:1–8	Mary Magdalene, Mary mother of James, Salome	Set out to anoint Jesus's body

## Mark

All of Mark's material on women is also found in Matthew and Luke. Mark doesn't have any special interest in women beyond the basic story line. Only the last two references in the Gospel draw attention to a group of devoted female followers of Jesus. The female characters featured in Mark's Gospel are an integral part of Jesus's story. In several cases, they approach Jesus to ask for healing, whether for themselves or a loved one (e.g., the Syrophenician woman). Other women show noteworthy devotion, such as the woman at Bethany who anoints Jesus, the women at the cross, and the women who set out to anoint Jesus's body at the end of the Gospel.

The absence of unique material on women in Mark, on the assumption of Markan priority (the view that Mark was the first canonical Gospel to be written), may suggest that all of Mark's material on women was subsequently incorporated into the other Synoptic Gospels, Matthew and Luke. Alternatively, on the assumption of Matthean priority (Matthew wrote first), Mark didn't add any material of his own beyond what he found in Matthew. In either case, the lack of particular Markan material indicates that Mark does not show a pronounced special interest in women characters in his Gospel.

As in the case of Matthew's Gospel, there is nothing in Mark's account that strikes one as out of the ordinary. Women are shown in their customary roles as concerned, loving—and, in at least one case, scheming—mothers, and as devoted followers. Jesus heals the woman with blood flow and the daughter of Jairus and of the Syrophenician woman and commends the poor widow. The familiar group of women is found at the cross and at the empty tomb. Mark's Gospel features an array of male and female characters who intersected with Jesus during his earthly ministry, with no necessary implications regarding the roles of men and women in leadership.

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Table 3.11: Selected Passages on Women in Luke

Luke	Woman character(s)	Description
1:5–25*	Elizabeth	Birth announcement
1:26–38*	Mary	Birth announcement
1:39–56*	Mary and Elizabeth	Visit, Mary's song
1:57–58*	Elizabeth	Birth of John the Baptist
2:1–20*	Mary	Birth of Jesus
2:36–38*	Anna the prophetess	Prophecies regarding Jesus
2:39–52*	Mary	Twelve-year-old Jesus at temple
7:11–15*	Widow at Nain	Son raised from the dead
7:36–50*	Woman who had led sinful life	Earlier anointing of Jesus
8:2–3*	Mary Magdalene, Joanna wife of Chuza, Susanna, and many others	Supporting Jesus and the Twelve
10:38–42*	Mary and Martha (sisters)	Listening vs. serving
11:27–28*	Woman in the crowd	Blessed is Jesus's mother
12:53	Mother vs. daughter, etc.	Not peace, but division
13:10–13*	Woman crippled for 18 years	Healed
15:8–10*	Woman who lost a coin	Figure in parable
18:1–8*	Persistent widow	Figure in parable
21:1–4	Poor widow	Commended for giving
23:49	Women who had followed from Galilee	Watching from a distance
23:55–24:11	Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Mary mother of James, and others	Set out to anoint Jesus's body

\*Only in Luke

## Luke

The material in Luke significantly complements that included in Mark and Matthew. As he mentions in his preface (Luke 1:1–4), Luke used a variety of sources (most likely Mark, plus possibly a source he shared with Matthew, as well as other written accounts and oral traditions). Drawing from these materials, Luke emphasized the universal scope of Jesus’s messianic ministry as Savior, healer, and teacher. Luke’s Gospel stands out as giving considerable attention to women, in keeping with Luke’s concern for those of low status in society, such as the poor, children, Gentiles, the disabled or sick, and tax collectors.

The birth narratives of John the Baptist and of Jesus are told from a female perspective, possibly on the basis of eyewitness accounts by Elizabeth and Mary, their mothers.<sup>26</sup> Luke 7:36–50 narrates a sinful woman’s anointing of Jesus.<sup>27</sup> The group of women following Jesus from Galilee all the way to the cross serves as a significant source of eyewitness testimony as well (note the *inclusio* of eyewitness testimony, an ancient literary device indicating firsthand eyewitnesses behind a written document, in Luke 8:2–3 and 23:49).<sup>28</sup> Women are also quite prominent in kingdom parables. Luke thus shows far-above-average interest in women as characters in the story of Jesus. It’s remarkable that Jesus created illustrations specifically for women to relate to, which implies that he treated women as potential or actual disciples.

In addition, one observes a consistent, most likely deliberate, pattern of pairing male and female characters in material unique to Luke’s Gospel. There are a dozen or so pairings that can be identified in the Gospel and several more in Acts. While not necessarily indicating male-female equality with regard to leadership positions in Jesus’s inner circle or the early church, this pattern does suggest, similar to Paul’s reference to “no male and female” in Galatians 3:28, that the male-female distinction was immaterial with regard to salvation in

<sup>26</sup>This contrasts with Matthew’s account, which reflects Joseph’s perspective.

<sup>27</sup>Wright, “Women’s Service,” 4, calls this “a priestly action which Jesus accepted as such.” The implications of this argument, however, are unclear: is this supposed to mean that the woman had priestly authority over Jesus?

<sup>28</sup>On the *inclusio* of eyewitness testimony, see Richard Bauckham, *Jesus and the Eyewitnesses: The Gospels as Eyewitness Testimony* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2006), 124–47.

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Jesus. The male-female pairs in Luke may include (but are not necessarily limited to) what is given in table 3.12.<sup>29</sup>

Table 3.12: Male-Female Pairs in Luke

Luke	Male character	Luke	Female character
1:5–23	Zechariah	1:26–56	Mary
2:25–35	Simeon	2:36–38	Anna
4:27	Naaman	4:26	Widow of Zarephath
4:31–37	Demon-possessed man	4:38–39	Peter's mother-in-law
6:13–16	The twelve apostles	8:2–3	A group of female disciples
7:11–17	Widow's son raised	8:40–56	Jairus's daughter raised
10:25–37	Teacher of the law	10:38–42	Martha and Mary
11:5–13	Persistent friend	18:1–8	Persistent widow
11:32	Men of Nineveh	11:31	Queen of Sheba
14:1–6	Man healed on Sabbath	13:10–17	Woman healed on Sabbath
19:9	Son of Abraham	13:16	Daughter of Abraham
15:3–7	Man who lost sheep	15:8–10	Woman who lost coin
13:19	Man sowing	13:21	Woman baking
24:13–35	Jesus appears to Emmaus disciples	24:1–11	Jesus appears to women

In his Gospel, Luke puts his readers more closely in touch with women such as Elizabeth and Mary by showing them their perspective as John the Baptist's or Jesus's mother. He also provides us with memorable female characters featured in Jesus's parables, such as the woman who lost a coin (balancing the references to the male shep-

<sup>29</sup>See also the male-female pairs in Acts listed in the following chapter.

herd and the father with his two sons, including the Prodigal) and the persistent widow.

Some of these pairs are more compelling than others, but even if some were eliminated, a pattern emerges that is more pronounced than what is found in the other Gospels.<sup>30</sup> Highlighting Jesus’s appeal to both men and women may have been Luke’s way of demonstrating that Christianity as a movement was attracting people from all classes and types.

Perhaps more than the other Synoptic Gospels, Luke features women as Jesus’s devoted followers and disciples, most notably the group of women from Galilee as well as Mary and Martha (who are also featured in John’s Gospel; see below). Nevertheless, Jesus is not shown to overturn the biblical pattern of male leadership. Of all the Gospels, Luke is most emphatic in his emphasis on Jesus’s outreach to women and others of lower status in society.

Table 3.13: Selected Passages on Women in John

John	Woman character(s)	Description
2:1–11*	Jesus’s mother	Wedding at Cana
2:12*	Jesus’s mother	Jesus’s family, Capernaum
4:1–42*	Samaritan woman	Believes in Jesus, witnesses
11:1–37*	Mary and Martha	Raising of Lazarus
12:1–8	Mary and Martha	Dinner, Mary anoints Jesus
19:25–27	Jesus’s mother, mother’s sister, Mary wife of Clopas, Mary Magdalene	Near the cross; Jesus ensures care of his mother
20:1–18	Mary Magdalene	Recognition scene

\*Only in John

<sup>30</sup>As we’ll see below, the pattern continues in the book of Acts.

## John

In keeping with his pattern of selecting a limited number of significant episodes in Jesus's ministry and recounting these in greater detail, John features several accounts that include women. Examples include Jesus's mother at the Cana wedding, the Samaritan woman, and Mary and Martha at the raising of Lazarus.<sup>31</sup> Jesus's appearance to Mary Magdalene is also very significant.

The contrast John draws between the Samaritan woman and Nicodemus, a ruler of Israel, is most likely due not to their different genders but to the racial distinction between Jews and Samaritans so as to underscore the availability of salvation to anyone who believes (John 4:9: "Jews have no dealings with Samaritans"; cf. 12:32: "And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all [kinds of] people to myself").

The Samaritan woman is shown as an important witness to Jesus, and Mary Magdalene, significantly, is the first witness of the resurrection in the Gospel. This affirms the value of women as witnesses to the gospel story and of their calling to share their faith with others.<sup>32</sup> It also stands in remarkable contrast to first-century society, in which women's witness was widely disparaged.<sup>33</sup>

## Implications

What did Jesus do? Surveying the Gospels, it is striking to see how many lives of both men and women Jesus touched and how he serves as a wonderful example of the way to treat women and men with dignity, respect, love, and compassion. We've noted how Jesus appointed and trained a core group of male followers, the Twelve, to lead his new messianic community after Jesus's physical departure from this earth. Jesus's choice of twelve men as his apostles who would form the nucleus of the leadership of the early church (Matt. 10:2–4; Mark 3:13–19; see also Eph. 2:20) is significant for the following reasons:<sup>34</sup>

<sup>31</sup>The account of the adulterous woman in John 7:53–8:11 is not addressed because it was likely not in John's original Gospel. See the footnotes in most English Bibles. For more details, consult Köstenberger, *John*, 245–49.

<sup>32</sup>E.g., Robert G. Maccini, *Her Testimony Is True: Women as Witnesses according to John*, Journal for the Study of the New Testament Supplement 125 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1996).

<sup>33</sup>E.g., Josephus, *Antiquities* iv.8.15: "But let not the testimony of women be admitted, on account of the levity and boldness of their sex."

<sup>34</sup>Cf. Borland, "Women in the Life and Teaching of Jesus," 111–13.

- The apostles were to be with Jesus to learn from him, to be sent out to preach the good news of the gospel, and to be trained by him personally as the future leaders of the church (Mark 3:14–15). As Jesus said, “The student is not above his teacher, but everyone who is fully trained will be like his teacher” (Luke 6:40 NIV).
- Jesus promised the apostles the teaching ministry of the Holy Spirit and the reception of special revelation, which would issue in the writing of the New Testament documents (John 14:26; 16:13–15).
- Later, when a need arose to replace Judas as twelfth apostle after Jesus’s ascension, one of the requirements was that his replacement be male. Acts 1:21–22 states, “So one of the *men* [Greek *andrōn*, “males”] who have accompanied us during all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us, . . . one of these *men* [implied in the Greek from verse 21] must become with us a witness to his resurrection.”
- The apostles were the official leaders of the early church who continued Jesus’s mission in the power of the Holy Spirit in keeping with Jesus’s intentions (Acts 2:14; 5:12, 18, 40, 42; 6:2–4; 9:29; 15:2; Gal. 1:17).
- As a testimony to the permanence of male leadership in the church, the apostles will be given special positions of leadership at the end of time (Matt. 19:28; Luke 22:30) and the names of the twelve apostles will be inscribed on the foundation of the New Jerusalem (Rev. 21:14; see also Eph. 2:20).

We’ve also observed the considerable variety of male characters who form part of Jesus’s story or who are featured in Jesus’s parables.

Regarding the way in which Jesus related to women, based on our study of the relevant passages in the Gospels, we can observe the following:

- Jesus treated women consistently with respect, dignity, compassion, and kindness (e.g., Luke 7:36–50). This is characteristic of his dealings with the numerous women who approached him for help,

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whether on their own behalf (Luke 13:10–17) or on behalf of a loved one (Luke 7:11–15).<sup>35</sup>

- Jesus dealt with women honestly and straightforwardly, firmly resisting any attempts to be manipulated or otherwise swayed from truth. He didn't treat women as morally superior or inherently more virtuous because of their gender. Women are sinners just like men.<sup>36</sup>
- In his teaching Jesus often used women as illustrations, especially in his parables (e.g., Matt. 24:41; 25:1–13; Luke 15:8–10; 18:1–8). This indicates Jesus's desire that his message of God's kingdom resonate with women as well as men. In so doing, he made a special effort to communicate his teaching in ways that were applicable to women and to use examples that were relevant for them.
- At many occasions Jesus showed special sensitivity to women's concerns. One example of this awareness is Jesus's remark concerning the fate of pregnant women and nursing mothers at the coming tribulation (Matt. 24:19; Mark 13:17). On another occasion Jesus took the time to address the wailing Jerusalem women on his way to the cross (Luke 23:27–31).
- Women followed Jesus, often with great devotion. Luke features a group of loyal women followers who traveled with Jesus and the Twelve and supported them financially (Luke 8:2–3). The Gospels show some of these same women at the cross, the burial, and as the first witnesses of the resurrection (Luke 23:49). These women exhibit strong faith, intensity of devotion, and unusual insight regarding Jesus's true identity as the Messiah. Women had a significant part in Jesus's mission.
- Jesus taught women the Scriptures and treated them as disciples (e.g., Luke 10:38–42). This, too, is highly significant in the context of a culture where women's opportunity to learn the Scriptures was limited. It certainly serves as an encouragement for women today

<sup>35</sup>Borland (*ibid.*, 108) writes, "Jesus showed how highly he valued women by ministering to them and meeting their needs. . . . He healed them, dialogued with them, and showed women the same care and concern He showed to men."

<sup>36</sup>This can be seen in Jesus's interactions with his mother (John 2:3–5; Mark 3:20–21, 31–35), the Samaritan woman (John 4:7–26), the Syrophenician woman (Matt. 15:21–28; Mark 7:24–30), Martha and Mary (Luke 10:38–42), a woman in a crowd who called Jesus's mother blessed (Luke 11:27–28), and the mother of the sons of Zebedee (Matt. 20:20–21).

to grow spiritually, to read the Scriptures, even to go to seminary, and to learn as much as they can about the biblical teaching and to share their learning with others in appropriate ways.

- Women served as witnesses to Jesus. The Samaritan woman bore witness to her entire village (John 4:1–42). Mary Magdalene was the first to see the risen Jesus and was told to pass on the good news to his disciples (John 20:11–18). This contrasts with the generally negative Jewish attitude toward women witnesses in the first century.
- While Jesus affirmed the creation of humanity as male and female in God’s image (Matt. 19:4 citing Gen. 1:27), was receptive to women’s requests for help, showed great love toward women, and was genuinely interested in their spiritual welfare, he didn’t elevate them to positions of leadership. This is different from his dealings with Jews and Gentiles where he clearly envisioned a future time when Gentiles would be included in the church (presumably including in leadership positions; see, e.g., Matt. 28:18–20).<sup>37</sup>

Table 3.14: Observations on Jesus’s Treatment of Women

<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Jesus treated women consistently with respect, dignity, compassion, and kindness.</li> <li>2. Jesus dealt with women honestly and straightforwardly, firmly resisting any attempts to be manipulated or otherwise swayed from truth.</li> <li>3. Jesus often portrayed women alongside men in illustrations, especially in his parables.</li> <li>4. Jesus showed special sensitivity to women’s concerns.</li> <li>5. Women followed Jesus, often with great devotion, and supported him financially, and Jesus encouraged their participation in his ministry.</li> <li>6. Women served as witnesses to Jesus.</li> <li>7. Jesus taught women the Scriptures and treated them as (potential or actual) disciples.</li> <li>8. Jesus didn’t envision a community where men and women would be equal with respect to assuming positions of leadership.</li> </ol>
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In teaching on marriage and divorce, Jesus affirmed the foundational teaching of the first two chapters of Genesis. In his choice of

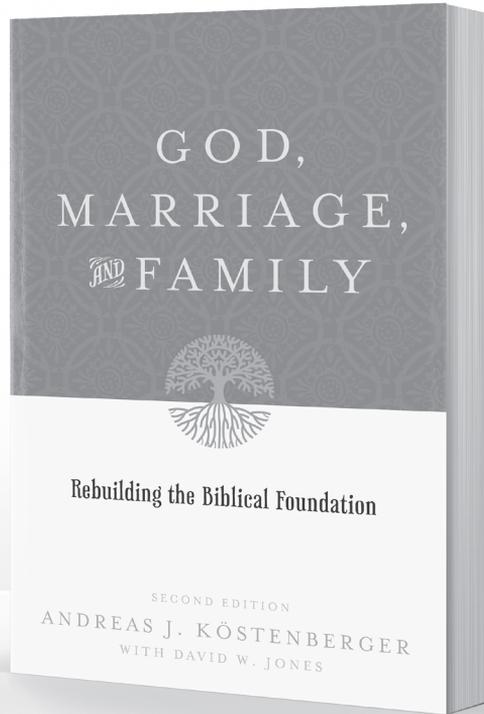
<sup>37</sup>See on this Andreas J. Köstenberger and Peter T. O’Brien, *Salvation to the Ends of the Earth: A Biblical Theology of Mission*, New Studies in Biblical Theology 11 (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2001), esp. chaps. 4–6 and 8.

twelve men as apostles, Jesus placed himself in continuity with the pattern of male leadership that can be observed from the beginning of the Bible throughout the Old Testament. At the same time, Jesus's treatment of women as disciples, witnesses, and loyal followers is truly amazing and deeply inspiring. In the next chapter, we'll take a look to see how men and women served in the early church subsequent to Jesus's ascension. We'll also look at the roles men and women played in the churches Paul planted. This will further help us to understand and apply to our own lives what it means to be a man or a woman according to God's design.

### Key Resources

- Arnold, Clinton E., ed. *Zondervan Illustrated Bible Backgrounds Commentary*. 5 vols. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2001. Vols. 1 and 2 are on the Gospels.
- Bauckham, Richard. *Gospel Women: Studies of the Named Women in the Gospels*. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2002. (Note: Read this one with particular discernment. Bauckham is a first-rate scholar, but he sometimes goes out on a limb in the conclusions he draws from the evidence.)
- Borland, James. "Women in the Life and Teaching of Jesus." In *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood: A Response to Evangelical Feminism*, edited by John Piper and Wayne Grudem, 105–16. Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 1991.
- Ferguson, Everett. *Backgrounds of Early Christianity*. 3rd ed. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2003.
- Jeffers, James S. *The Greco-Roman World of the New Testament Era: Exploring the Background of Early Christianity*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1999.
- Köstenberger, Margaret Elizabeth. *Jesus and the Feminists: Who Do They Say That He Is?* Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2008. Chap. 14.
- Osborne, Grant R. "Women in Jesus' Ministry." *Westminster Theological Journal* 51 (1989): 259–91. (Note: Osborne takes an egalitarian approach, which is apparent especially in the conclusions he draws at the end of the article.)

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